

October 13, 2004

The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

We write regarding concerns raised in recent press reports about the military's anthrax vaccination program at Dover Air Force Base. While we have also sought responses from the Department of Defense, we believe that a thorough non-Department investigation of the program's history and current practice at Dover AFB is needed. We request the GAO conduct such an investigation. We know that GAO is familiar with the anthrax vaccination program and the issue of squalene from prior reports you have done. That expertise will be invaluable in quickly moving forward.

The importance of clearing the air on this issue cannot be overstated. It is in the best interests of everyone for there to be well-documented and readily available information regarding the necessity of the anthrax vaccine, the presence or absence of squalene, and the possible health effects associated with the vaccine and given amounts of squalene. It is critical to the credibility of the U.S. Air Force that the concerns raised by a former wing commander be reviewed in an open and transparent fashion. The controversy surrounding the history of the anthrax vaccine at Dover AFB creates a drag on morale and concerns among personnel at a time when all of their energy should be devoted to their vital missions.

Furthermore, as part of resolving this issue, we would like to know the results of the research we understand the Department has done on the effects of squalene in vaccines. In addition, it is important to explain the rationale for the Army's decision to seek a patent for a new anthrax vaccine that includes squalene. What is the status of that vaccine's development and testing? In the case of squalene, what is the scientific basis being used by the military for deciding that there are no harmful effects resulting from the introduction of a foreign element into the human body, even if that element is already present in the body?

The Honorable David M. Walker
October 13, 2004
Page Two

Our goal is to clear up this matter as expeditiously as possible. We hope that GAO's investigation will ensure that we have all the facts regarding what occurred at Dover AFB, what the Department is doing to ensure that there is not a repeat of these problems, and how the Department is ensuring accountability. We would also welcome the GAO's thoughts on whether additional outside review of the vaccine's safety by a respected non-governmental agency would be beneficial. In light of the fact that the mandatory anthrax vaccination program is being restarted and expanded, we believe it is essential that GAO, as a respected outside investigator, address the questions and concerns raised in the press as quickly as possible.

As GAO looks into these matters, we would appreciate it if your staff consulted with Erin Logan of Senator Biden's staff, Sean Barney of Senator Carper's staff, and Jim Catella of Representative Castle's staff prior to beginning their work and before the work is completed. For your information we have attached copies of the recent relevant press stories. We look forward to the results of your investigation into these issues which do directly impact the health and well-being of our military personnel.

Sincerely,

Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
United States Senator

Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

Michael N. Castle
Member of Congress